

**mind
moon
circle**



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This issue explores the many dimensions of 'letting go'.

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Glenys Jackson – cover and drawings of leaves

The spring issue will focus on Insight.

** actual moments of insight*

** encouraging insight*

** effects, aftermath of insight*

** the whatever of insight*

*Please send contributions to Doug Mason at
dougmason@ozemail.com.au by Aug 21*

Profound Simplicity

Robert Aitken

Vairochana, pure and clear, Dharmakāya Buddha,
Lochana, full and complete, Sambhogakāya Buddha,
Shakyamuni, infinitely varied, Nirmāmakāya Buddha.



We recite this gatha of the Three Bodies of the Buddha before meals at Diamond Sangha sesshin, as do monks, nuns and lay people in other Zen centers across the world. The gatha is thus imprinted daily as a reminder of the wellspring of Buddhism—the three-point complementarity that we formulate as the plinth of our practice and our world view.

Each line sets forth the name of one of the three bodies, a brief reminder of its function and its archetypal title. The names, Vairochana, Lochana and Shakyamuni, identify their importance to Shingon, Kegon, and Zen and other schools of Japanese Mahayana. Their archetypal titles identify their religious forms. In practice, these forms are the central images for veneration: Vairochana marks primordial emptiness as masculine, Lochana marks the inclusion of multitudes as feminine, while Shakyamuni is the loftiest possible example of particularity.

Vairochana is the Dainichi Nyorai of the Shingon school, the Great Sun Buddha whose attributes and rituals are carried over from Tibetan Buddhism. Lochana and its sutra, the Huayan, set forth the vast Net of Indra, and is memorialized as the Great Buddha of Nara at Tōdaiji. Many Zen cases resonate with the network of Lochana, and her sutra is frequently cited in commentaries, Shakyamuni is sometimes venerated in Zen for words he probably didn't utter, as for example statements about the realization of all beings that coincided with his own great experience.ⁱ

Teishō by Huineng, Linji and Dōgen, and a number of cases in the literature turn on The Three Bodies. Here is an example of a case from the record of Dongshan:

A monk asked Dongshan: "Among the Three Bodies of the Buddha, which one preaches the Dharma?"

Dongshan said, "I am always intimate with it."ⁱⁱ

Try that one on your cushions.

Zen Dust and Buddhist dictionaries carry definitions that can be quite technical. For example here is the entry in *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*:

In Zen the three bodies of buddha are three levels of reality, which stand in reciprocal relationship to each other and constitute a whole. The

dharmakāya (Jap., *hosshin*) is the cosmic consciousness, the unified existence that lies beyond all concepts. This substrate, characterized by completion and perfection, out of which all animate and inanimate forms as well as the moral order arise, is embodied in Vairochana (Jap., Birushana).

The *sambhogakāya* (Jap., *hōjin*) is the experience of the ecstasy of enlightenment, of the dharma-mind of the Buddha and the patriarchs, and of the spiritual practices transmitted by them. It is symbolized by Amitābha (Jap., Amida).

The *nirmānakāya* (Jap., *ōjin*) is the radiant, transformed buddha-body personified by Shākyamuni Buddha.ⁱⁱⁱ

Clear enough for a dictionary entry, I suppose, but not really helpful at the level of experience. The dialogue of the monk with Dongshan is obscure because it is profound. It is not complex, but like all Zen cases worthy of their category it is ultimately simple. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Horatio's philosophy—or in the philosophy of others as well, it seems to me.

I have come full circle in my aspirations. When I was a would-be intellectual as a teen-ager, it seemed to me that I should be aiming for profound simplicity. I am now in my teen years again, counting from the other end. Profound simplicity is for me once again an attractive ideal. It is more filled out, but offering nothing at all to deal with, not even nothing!

And what could be simpler than Whitman's inclusion of multitudes? There is no discrimination whatever. What could be simpler than the Buddha's love for each being? Accept his eye as your own, and every individual creature is fascinating in itself. I remember Arne Næss remarking in a discussion of experiments with live animals, "I love my rats."

The Three Bodies are complex in direct proportion to the obscurity of their presentation. I once worked with a man who had been a horse trainer. It's a knack, he said. "Either you got it or you don't got it," That's a bit like kōan study, but only a little. Even a knack for reading poetry has its limitations. Here's Whitman in "Song of Myself" about getting at the meaning of poetry:

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the
earth much?

Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of
all poems,

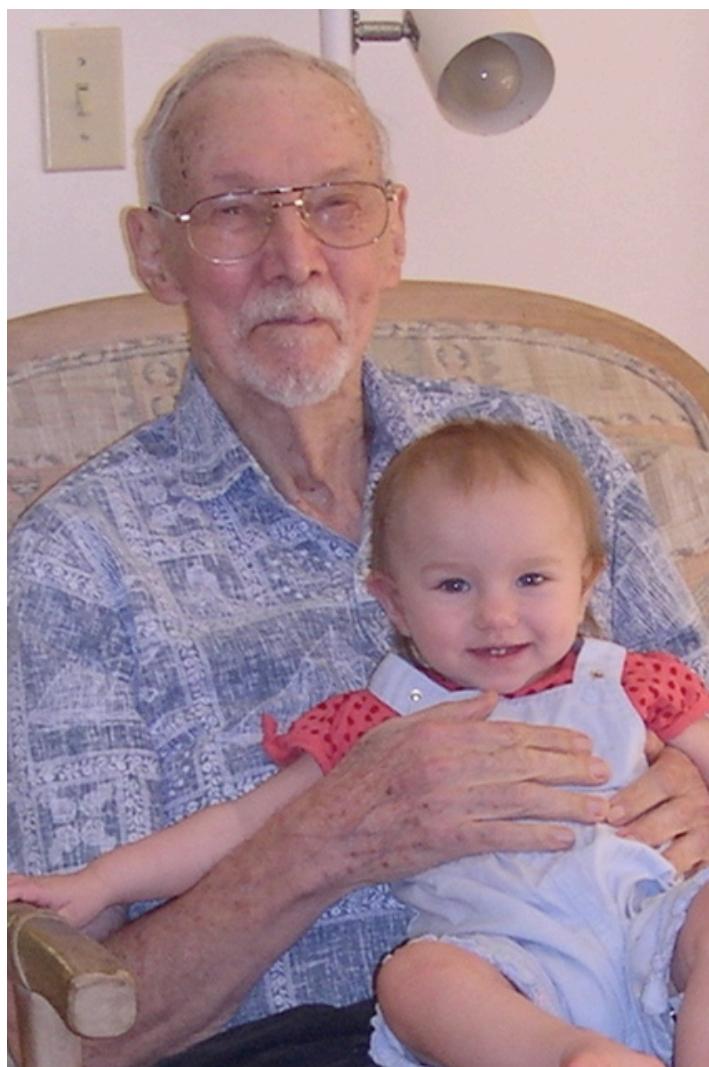
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of



suns left,)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through
the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

The challenge to the master is to weed out the knacks. It is easy to make mistakes, and the new master will make them. What would be the origin of all kōans? Ask the child on the floor with her blocks about a fire engine—and stand back. That's your clue for today.



Robert Aitkin with his Grandchild

ⁱ Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-Chi) Zen* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 256.

ⁱⁱ Thomas Cleary, trans., *Book of Serenity* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), p. 422.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael H. Kohn, trans., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), p. 230.



Learn all their Songs, Sweet Lyrebird

Learn all their songs, sweet lyrebird
The mountain waters sigh.
They rush unbounded through the rocks
And leap from way up high.
They laugh and gallop through the green,
Their silver veins uncurled.

Sweet Lyrebird, learn all their songs
And when they all are gone.
I'll come and listen to you sing
And hear their vanished songs.
The thrush, the whistlers, and the wrens,
Where the white, white water's hurl.

Learn all their songs, sweet Lyrebird,
And keep them, keep them,
Keep them for the world.

By Denis Kevans



Image from: www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/birds/images/t3234.jpg

Monster at the Door¹



Larry Agriesti

There is an implicit promise that if you just ‘let go’, pain, sorrow, and anguish will dissipate, dissolve and disappear like morning fog with the rising sun. Crap. Billie Holiday sings about this in “Good Morning Heartache” when she coldly observes heartache’s return after she had said goodbye to it the night before: “Here you are again with the dawn” she sings, “might as well just sit down.” Good advice.

In our practice of letting things be just as they are, we are tempted at times to hope that pain will disappear along with the layers of suffering we have managed to sweep away. But what remains is what remains. No amount of rubbing and polishing will repair a crack in a cherished ceramic. It’s there.

In psychotherapy most clients desire to completely rid themselves of painful memories or present anguish. “I want to just let go” they say, “and be at peace”. And so the difficult work of learning how to live creatively and compassionately with grief and pain begins. I tell them the memory of pain will always be there, but we can learn how to soften it; not add unnecessary suffering by dwelling on it or trying to push it away, bury it, or forget it. Impossible; the body mind remembers everything. At any moment a sound, a familiar smell, the touch of someone’s hand will bring it all back with intense immediacy and there is no protection from these random reminders of what has been and what has hurt. Yet this is true of what we remember of joy and happy moments as well. Angels at the door, yes; monsters, no!

So what do we do when the monster arrives at our door, unwelcomed, carrying his bag of scary things and threats of torture? Invite him in, Billie would say, and make him a cup of tea, tell him you have other things to do but he can stay as long as he likes. What? Treat

¹ Photo source www.stpaulsrome.it/images/monsterchair.jpg

the monster with kindness? Are you mad?

When I was a little boy, there was a local movie house that showed Saturday afternoon matinees of 20 cartoons and a feature film for 10 cents. Usually they screened monster movies like Frankenstein, The Mummy, Creature from the Black Lagoon, and countless other fright flicks. I would sit in the very front row and shriek with terror and delight at these monsters, munching on my Abazaba candy bar. My most enduring and favourite memory is the scene in Frankenstein's Monster when, after being tormented and chased by irate villagers with pitchforks and flaming torches, he happens upon a quiet cottage in the woods. An elderly blind man is there and, hearing the monster's grunts, assumes he is a mute and invites him in for some tea. The monster hesitates, but with slow trust complies. "You can't speak and I can't see" the old man says, but we can enjoy some good music together." He then begins to play a soft and lovely tune on his violin, and as the camera pans and focuses on the monster's face, you see tears forming in his eyes. A moment of beauty and peace. The



monster is not so scary after all.

There are many ways to live comfortably with monsters, demons, and ghosts from the past. Listen to what they want to tell us; they bear important information. Give them some comfort and the right to be; its OK. You don't have to drive them away, and you can get on with the tasks of living regardless. In fact (and this is really hard sometimes) you might actually see their own brand of beauty, and be even grateful they came to call.

Let go of letting go, and love what remains; let it be, even the hurtful stuff. If we have an expectation that pain can be forgotten or eliminated we will always fail, always be disappointed when something we thought was finished, over and done with returns again.

If you think perhaps this is just stoic posturing, consider also the potential of transmuting anguish into bliss. As the years fall behind us, the indelible memory of what we learned, what we endured and lived through comes to play again and again in the most miraculous ways. The body remembers everything, including the ache of loneliness and abandonment, the slap on the face, the unkind word. What then do you suppose occurs when at some other moment in time you are held or touched with kindness and affection? You would have missed an unspeakable beauty without those embedded memories.

'Letting go' is just one of the tools we use in our bag of tricks to navigate and manage as best we can, and it is certainly useful. But it is, as with most devices, limited in its application. It is contradicted by the equally powerful admonition 'hold on!' And there's the rub; when to hold on and when to let go. What a pathetic world we would live in if

everyone ‘let go’ when things became difficult; the research, the exploration, the creation of art and science, and the hard work of enduring love.

There is a knowing that could not have been known without the past; a deepness and richness that far surpasses what we could possibly know otherwise. If you really need to let go of something, let go of bearing glorious and sometimes to both what is given and what is



senseless wrestling with an angel painful gifts. Yield to what needs to be; taken away.

Walton Street

Winter night, half moon--
In the sky of imagination
its jocular profile

Maggie Gluek



Even Trees in the Oxford Botanic Gardens

Early December
and still bright in autumn foliage,
“That liquid amber,” says the young horticulturalist
“just can’t let go.”

Maggie Gluek

Reflections on ‘letting go’

(Britta Biedermann talked to *Annie Ploughman*, who works as a Psychotherapist in the Inner West with people from all different cultural backgrounds).

Starting from the position of ‘how to uncomfortable feelings’, Annie first, holding it in a gentle, ‘make friends’ and ‘sit with’ the pain. In other words, it is important to know our suffering first, so that we know what we can ‘let go’ of. Otherwise ‘letting go’ becomes ‘pushing away’.



deal with emotional pain / points out that comforting the pain compassionate way, enables us to

In Western cultures, the concept of ‘knowing our own suffering’ is often perceived as ‘being a self-indulgent, self-pitying activity’, which is misleading. The Western imperative to “Soldier on!” encourages us to ‘push away’, ‘run from’, or ‘ignore’ our pain, so that ‘having compassion for oneself’ becomes a weakness. But it is through exercising empathy for ourselves, that we are able to feel genuine compassion for the suffering of others: it becomes a joining experience. ‘Hold the pain’, ‘get to know it’, ‘find compassion for yourself and ultimately for others’ seems to be important in Annie’s work as a psychotherapist. “Letting go” becomes a non-action, where we sit and hold our feelings gently and safely until they can ‘float away’.

Annie made a striking comment in the end of our conversation: “sometimes we need others to help us to hold our pain. In Western Society, we are pushing so hard for independence in all areas of our lives. Asking others for help in emotional vulnerable situations can feel like a failure. But we can’t possibly exist on our own, we are *dependent on one another* and that is ‘nice and proper’ ”.



‘Mother and Child’, ceramic sculpture by Janet Selby

Autumn - time to prepare for the stillness of winter.

Justine Wilcox (works as a Yoga teacher and a Shiatsu therapist in Newtown)



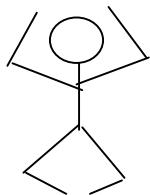
Autumn is a time of concentration, a time to prepare for the stillness of winter. In meridian therapy, such as shiatsu and meridian yoga, it is the lung and the large intestine meridians, we work with this time. These meridians both relate to 'release' and 'letting go'. The organs that these meridians correspond to relate to elimination, both physical and emotional: we release baggage that we no longer need to carry. We also use our breath to aid elimination. If our lung and large intestine meridians are functioning well, we are more likely to be able to fight influenza and digestive complaints. Foods such as ginger, root vegetables, miso soup and kuzu (a wild arrow root) are very beneficial foods for autumn. The lungs respond especially well to lotus root tea. There are some simple yoga postures you can do to open up the lung meridian, which are especially beneficial in the morning. All twists are excellent for the large intestine

if performed in
intestine

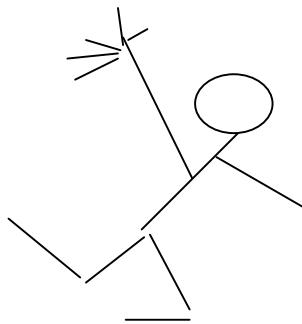


Lung Yoga:

Thumbs in fists; hold breath pound a) upper chest (2x), breathe in again; b) lower chest (2x), breathe in again; c) pump arms again (2x). Hold breath and pound as long as possible before exhaling again and starting over.



In kneeling position tuck toes under; hold right ankle if possible; inhale and lift hips over knees and stretch arm back 45degrees out from body – pull thumb back. Exhale down; swap sides (8-10x)





Jukai Vows

Yvonne Hales

I take refuge in the Buddha

I take refuge in my own Buddha nature where I return to my true self. I seek comfort and shelter in the self-nature of those who are dear to me. I take refuge in fallen leaves and in raindrops.

I take refuge in the Dharma

I take refuge in the teachings of the clouds and sandstone rocks. I learn each time I fall over. I learn from the waves pounding at the base of the rocky headland. I learn from trees and branches that fall across the bush track. I take refuge in my own wisdom, in bird song and in the stars.

I take refuge in the Sangha

I take refuge in the delicate lacework that shapes this universe. I dwell in this community where all beings are interconnected. I vow to respect and take care of this harmonious body that is Blue Gum High Forest, cicada shells and mountain streams.

I vow to maintain the precepts

Each time I trip up, each time I allow delusive thinking to take control, my fall will be interrupted. I will land safely on the solid ground of no-self. There I will take refuge in the nourishment and healing offered by the precepts.

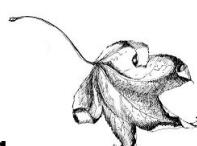
I vow to practice all good dharmas

I vow to put aside all unnecessary thoughts. I will dilute impulses to acquire material things that I do not need. I bring my awareness to distractions that I encounter along the path. I will not let those diversions get in the way of my living a simple life.

I vow to save the many beings

I bring awareness to negative seeds that are watered by preoccupations with self. I turn towards the emptiness that is this vast fathomless

Dharma.



I take up the way of not killing

I break the intimacy and deep affection I feel for loved ones when self participates too eagerly in my conduct, speech and thought. I will not waste moments in idle contemplation. I will nurture each relationship and each moment using skilful means.

I take up the way of not stealing

As I take from the earth I disturb its natural equilibrium. When I acquire things that I have little need for I waste valuable resources. I will appreciate each moment for what it brings not for how it can benefit self.

I take up the way of not misusing sex

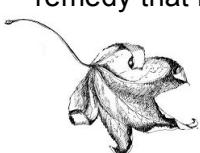
I will not cast aside my sexual desires nor will I refrain from giving expression to my sexuality. I will contain these passions to allow intimacy and joy to arise. I will entertain my sexuality in relationships where there is trust, love and respect.

I take up the way of not speaking falsely

When I foreground self in my speech there is the potential to be misinterpreted and to harm others. I will discard urges to misrepresent the truth. I will allow moments to open up in a space of silent presentation.

I take up the way of not giving or taking drugs

I alone am responsible for the quality of my well-being. I will not ingest any stimulant or remedy that has the effect of clouding my mind or darkening my heart. I will care for the well being of others. I will honour my ability to dwell in each moment with clarity.



I take up the way of not discussing the faults of others

Gossip, overcritical remarks and unhelpful observations emerge from my own ignorance and desire to defend a wounded self. I acknowledge the ease with which such words and thoughts can obscure an honest and open heart. I will nurture intimacy and compassion towards others.

I take up the way of not praising myself while abusing others

When I relocate self to the margin there is no room for arrogance to arise. I will not blame anyone or anything for the way I feel or react. While fear and instability will continue to arise I will look to my own self-nature for guidance on how to overcome them.

I take up the way of not sparing the Dharma assets

When I deny myself opportunities to share the talents I have acquired I in turn deny others the chance to blossom. I will give my affection and my time. I will be there for loved ones and for the myriad dharmas throughout the universe. I will share my energy in the inspiration and support of others.

I take up the way of not indulging in anger

I will observe the energy that arises from angry emotions. I will transform that energy into the enjoyment of physical exercise. I will rest while those angry emotions subside. I vow

to avoid touching others with my anger. With a clear invigorated mind I will turn angry emotions into compassion for others.

I take up the way of not defaming the three treasures

I awake to the presence of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. I awake to my self-nature; I dwell in sunrise; I seek shade under the eucalypts; I am touched by the simplicity of falling rain. I learn from the vast and fathomless teachings. I will care for those who are close to me and I vow to live in harmony with all beings. So wake up!



Haiku

At peace
under the she-oaks by the bay;
a gentle breeze stirs our hair.



(Coles Bay, Tasmania, summer of 1975).

Kim McShane



encounter

transfixed by the torch
a wild little monster

fat, furry ground-hugger
nervy, afraid

sad, unutterably sad
alone

a blind wombat

Doug Mason

Jet Zen (2)

Over Lane Cove

The big jet curves and banks southwards,
Hooks into the north-south ILS,
An invisible red thread in the air
that pulls each jet across
My Backyard in inner-west Sydney
To the tarmac at Mascot.
Hurtling and whining
Across the humid sky
Plumes of turbulence
Peel off each wingtip
As it comes towards us...

Sue chimes the jiki bell
It ripples by us three times.
As we sit in Annandale
Backs to each other
Faces to the wall

Contemplating paintwork and plaster.
And there they go - just up there –
Another sangha of warm bodies
Strapped inside a metal casing
Humanity in a bullet
Sitting in serried rows
With seats upright and tray tables in place.

The video's been switched off,
The last stubbie's been handed in.
Landing lies dead ahead:
Eyes shut, straight back,
Tight bum, flat feet.
Remember the brace,
thinks 33E, and 71A.
Where's that bloody 'Music for the Soul'
channel!?
Will she be waiting for me when I get through?
Wonder what his new place is like?
How will I tell them that I forgot....?
Such and such, and so and so.

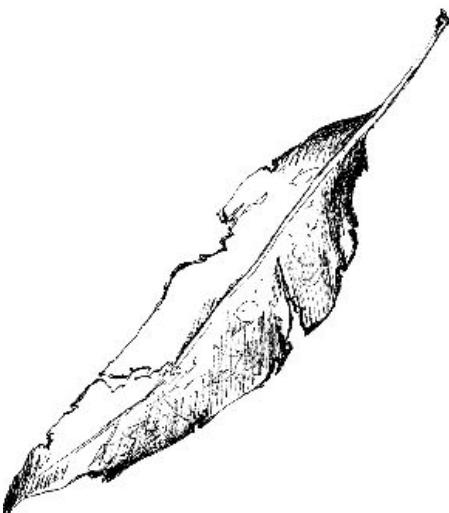
What am I thinking?
Back to the breath, back to 1 and 2...
Alone in my seat, and on my mat
Up there down here...

Now you hear it.
Now you don't.
Jet jet fu ri shin.

Kim McShane, 2007

Guided by the Moon and Flowers

Gillian Coote



'Remembering a wrong is like carrying a burden on the mind' the Buddha is quoted as saying. His words echo in this story from Zen Flesh, Zen Bones. (1)

Tanzan and Ekido were once travelling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection.

'Come on,' girl, said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud.

Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he could no longer restrain himself.

'We monks don't go near females,' he told Tanzan, 'especially not young and lovely ones. It's dangerous. Why did you do that?'

'I left the girl there,' said Tanzan, 'are you still carrying her?'

'The burdens of the past we carry, in conscious and unconscious ways, have the power to pervade and limit every area of our lives', Christina Feldman writes in her book, Woman Awake! (2) 'We become debilitated by them and further debilitated by our seeming inability to let go of our burdens. Like a person going on a train journey, we carry our heavy luggage to the station and continue to carry it even when the train has departed, not realising that we have the freedom to put it down. In our own lives, our lack of awareness and our fear and lack of trust in ourselves doom us to carry the burden of negative images unnecessarily.'

But as well as negative images, inevitably, life gives everyone normal burdens, such as grief and loss and it is important to honour these burdens and not attempt to abandon them prematurely. In normal grief, there are many common types of reaction, everyone having

different physical and psychological manifestations, and before grief can be resolved, there are some necessary tasks to be accomplished. These include accepting the reality of the loss, experiencing the pain of the grief, and adjusting to an environment in which the loved person is missing.

The greater the avoidance of accepting the reality of loss and experiencing its pain the

greater the tendency to experience disturbing emotions, thoughts and physical sensations. Paying attention to the arising and falling away of all conditions of mind and body - whether they be numbness, helplessness, fatigue, confusion or anger - shows how insubstantial and evanescent they are superficial waves on the sea of the mind. They are the context of your practice. Ground yourself in *this* breath.

In The Miracle of Mindfulness, (3) Jim Forrest tells of Thich Nhat Hanh's speaking tour against the war in Vietnam, undertaken in the United States in the late 1960's.



'After an hour with him, one was haunted with the beauties of Vietnam and filled with anguish at America's military intervention in the political and cultural tribulations of the Vietnamese people. One was stripped of all the ideological loyalties that justified one party or another in their battles and felt the horror of the skies raked with bombers, houses and humans burned to ash, children left to face life without the presence and love of their parents and grandparents.

But there was one evening when Nhat Hanh awoke not understanding, but rather the measureless rage of one American. He had been talking in the auditorium of a wealthy Christian church in a St. Louis suburb. As always, he emphasised the need for Americans to stop their bombing and killing in his country. There had been questions and answers when a large man stood up and spoke with searing scorn of the 'supposed compassion' of 'this Mr. Hanh'.

"If you care so much about your people Mr. Hanh, why are you here? If you care so much for the people who are wounded, why don't you spend your time with them?" At this point, my recollection of his words is replaced by the memory of the intense anger which overwhelmed me. When he finished, I looked toward Nhat Hanh in bewilderment. What could he - or anyone - say? The spirit of the war itself had suddenly filled the room, and it seemed hard to breathe.

There was a silence. Then Nhat Hanh began to speak - quietly, with deep calm, indeed with a sense of personal caring for the man who had just damned him. The words seemed like rain falling on fire. "If you want the tree to grow," he said, "it won't help to water the leaves. You have to water the roots. Many of the roots of the war are here, in your country. To help the people who are to be bombed, to try to protect them from this suffering, I have to come here."



The atmosphere in the room was transformed. In the man's fury we had experienced our own furies; we had seen the world as through a bomb bay. In Nhat Hanh's response we had experienced an alternate possibility; the possibility (here brought to Christians by a Buddhist and to Americans by an 'enemy') of overcoming hatred with love, of breaking the seemingly endless chain reaction of violence throughout human history.

But after his response, Nhat Hanh whispered something to the chairman and walked quickly from the room. Sensing something was wrong, I followed him out. It was a cool clear night. Nhat Hanh stood on the sidewalk beside the church parking lot. He was struggling for air -

like someone who had been deeply underwater and who had barely managed to swim to the surface before gasping for breath. It was several minutes before I dared ask him how he was or what had happened.

Nhat Hanh explained that the man's comments had been terribly upsetting. He had wanted to respond to him with anger. So he had made himself breathe deeply and very slowly in order to find a way to respond with calm and understanding. But the breathing had been too slow and too deep.

"Why not be angry with him?" I asked. "Even pacifists have a right to be angry."

"If it were just myself, yes. But I am here to speak for Vietnamese peasants. I have to show them what we can be at our best."

The water of the valley stream
never shouts at the tainted world: "Purify yourself!"
but naturally, as it is,
shows how it is done.

Ryokan (4)



Naturally, as it is. In a recent essay on meditation, Aitken Roshi writes: Breath after breath, letting go thoughts, dreams, fantasies and returning to the count, just "one," just "two," just "three" - patiently returning to "one" with each distraction, centering upon each number as a task, willingly recognising the distraction and returning to the breath, or the koan, the single point that is our focus in zazen which is a door to the world and the self so tiny that it has no dimension - there is the vast and fathomless mystery itself, and there

it is again, and again. Facing the point, "The solitary light shines brightly; it never darkens," as Keizan Jokin says.

Letting go is one movement, the other is facing the point. This is not an intellectual process but experiential - you realize intimately how things are. *The Buddha's Way is beyond attainment, I vow to embody it fully.* Embodying the Buddha's Way is your practice of letting go the self, of letting go self-centred behaviour, whether of thought or speech or action. Of course, just as it is for the water of the valley stream, there are rocks and boulders and snags everywhere. The process of purification is ongoing.

(5)

The Paramitas or transcendental perfections evolved with Mahayana Buddhism, originally six, (later becoming ten) an inspirational process, ongoing to the last breath and beyond, towards a life of clarity and grace. The first paramita is dana, usually thought of as giving, as in almsgiving, but there are deeper implications.

A monk asked Hui-hai, By what means can the gateway of our school be entered?

Hui-hai said, By means of the Dana Paramita.

The monk said, According to the Buddha, the Bodhisattva path comprises six Paramitas. Why have you mentioned only the one? Please explain why this one alone provides a sufficient means for us to enter.

Hui-hai said, Deluded people fail to understand that the other five all proceed from the Dana Paramita and that by its practice, all the others are fulfilled.

The monk asked, Why is it called the Dana Paramita?

Hui-hai said, Dana means relinquishment.

The monk asked, Relinquishment of what?

Hui-hai said, Relinquishment of the dualism of opposites, which means relinquishment of ideas as to the dual nature of good and bad, being and non-being, void and non-void, pure and impure and so on.



In his book, The Practice of Perfection, (6) Robert Aitken Roshi writes, 'Hui-hai does not include the dualism of self and other in his list of dichotomies we must relinquish, but it is clear that he intends that it be included, for he goes on to say, 'By a single act of relinquishment, everything is relinquished. I exhort you students to practise the way of relinquishment and nothing else, for it brings to perfection not only the other five Paramitas but also myriads of other practices.'



The Paramitas are not fixed rules, rather they are honoured with one's conduct,

speech and thought. Shantideva, the great 7th C Buddhist teacher, cites with approval the wisdom of an early Mahayana sutra: 'The perfections of the Bodhisattva do not support me - it is I who support them.' Here's how Ryokan, poet, hermit and wanderer, supported the Paramitas.

"When you encounter those who are wicked, unrighteous, foolish, dim-witted, vicious, chronically ill, lonely, unfortunate, or disabled, you should think: "How can I save them?" And even if there is nothing you can do, at least you must not indulge in feelings of arrogance, superiority, derision, scorn, or abhorrence, but should immediately manifest sympathy and compassion. If you fail to do so, you should feel ashamed and deeply reproach yourself: "How far I have strayed from the Way! How can I betray the old sages? I take these words as an admonition to myself."

The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,
and the weather is clear again.
If your heart is pure,
then all things in your world are pure.
Abandon this world, abandon yourself,
then the moon and the flowers will guide you along the Way.

Ryokan

(7)

Trust and faith that the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way builds as the practice matures, as that hinge of noticing, letting go and returning strengthens, trust and faith that though greed, hatred and ignorance rise endlessly, the vow to abandon them, to let them go, is growing gradually, is bearing fruit, is nurturing all beings.



Notes

- (1) Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, compiled by Paul Reps, pub. Arkana, 1991, p.28
- (2) Woman Awake! Christina Feldman, pub. Arkana, 1990, p.77
- (3) The Miracle of Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh, pub. Beacon Press, 1976, pps.102-104.
- (4) Excerpt from Simply Haiku: A Quarterly Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry, Summer 2006, vol. 4., no. 2 (www.simplyhaiku.com).
- (5) Zen Buddhist Practice: recent thoughts on the matter, Robert Aitken Roshi, 2002
- (6) The Practice of Perfection: The Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective, Robert Aitken, pub. Pantheon Books, 1994, pps.6-7.

(7) Simply Haiku (see above)

This life

Sue Bidwell

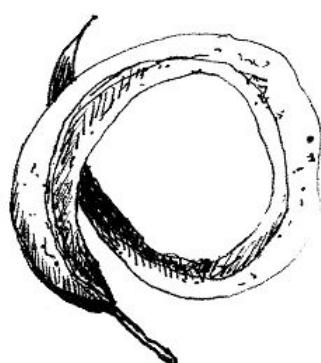


This life can go in an instant, an abrupt ending. As I watch a train approaching, I'm aware that an infinitesimal fragment of time exists between standing patiently until the train stops and the catastrophe of falling onto the tracks; between being here, and no longer existing. But the ending of life is not always sudden. It often just slowly seeps away with illness or old age.

What is immutable is that at some indeterminate time I'll be gone, we'll all be gone, breathing no more. If I knew my departure date, what then? Would priorities shift, petty irritations diminish? Or, in not knowing, can I learn to walk with death lightly, companionably, not grasping life, but relishing it; just being with my aliveness, moment by moment?

Of course this means letting go. 'Oh no' I hear my ego shout! When it clamours for attention and wants everything to happen on its own terms, letting go means accepting that there *are* no terms. It means dropping the certainty of who I am and letting go of retreating to the safe little compartments in my mind, so carefully constructed over the years to provide the security of familiar responses.

It means opening into a space where I'm no longer centre-stage; no... more than that, where 'I' no longer am. And, amazingly, when this happens, rather than feel empty and distant, there's a sense of being more alive, more real, more connected to others. It seems that life is in fact a continual experience of connections expressed through love, and the practice of letting go opens the way to love openly and to fully live each moment.



The Colour of the Wheat Fields

Britta Biedermann

It is not so much the letting go itself that I find difficult about letting go, it is much more the preparation that goes with it – the process *beforehand*. Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross notes that “most of us fight and resist loss throughout our lives, not understanding that life is loss and loss is life; life cannot change and we cannot grow without loss”.² She defines five stages which are commonly experienced in times of loss, change and grief. She talks about a journey through (i) denial, (ii) anger, (iii) bargaining, (iv) depression and finally (v) acceptance leading to letting go – this is not necessarily a linear process.

Some of us travel fast and forward; some of us need more time on this journey, travelling back and forth. There is no such thing as an “average letting go” time. Everyone takes their own time, has their own rhythm. It can sometimes be such a long painful journey until we land in this place called ‘acceptance’. It is neither a passive nor an active process. It seems we have no real control over that certain point in time when true acceptance comes. It is patience, which leads us there. In the meantime, we may need to access our “last” resources, sometimes until almost everything is used up. Often, it seems, we need to do the opposite first, which is cling to the impossible - the energy robber - until there seems no way out in order to get ready to “give up”....but this giving up can be so liberating...

Why is it so hard to trust this simple truth? Every day, life shows me that ‘letting go’ happens after I make friends with the uncomfortable. No matter how much I force it, how strictly I want to control situations, this will not happen, and then ironically, without really putting much effort in, things unfold and ‘losing’ suddenly turns into ‘gaining’. Suddenly, feelings of appreciation and gratitude can arise for people, things and circumstances which have been but cannot be anymore, and gratitude and excitement arise for people, things and experiences that will be but are yet unknown...

I would like to share some thoughts, which I felt and thought in the process *before* the awkward time – the journey towards “accepting”. That does not mean that I know how to ‘let go’. The more I think about it, the more I find that the concept of ‘letting go’ can be very misleading. In fact, I think I will never be able to let go of my experiences, including pain or joy. It is more that I accept these feelings as they are and that they belong to me. So here I am, travelling forward, and much more often backwards to places and experiences where I need to spend a little more time, where I need to dwell a little bit longer, and finding it OK to do so. It is ok to sit with the *knowing* ‘something needs to be changed’ bit, and it is ok to ‘not wanting to know that it’s time for a change’ bit. We all have our own timing of change until we truly accept that ‘it doesn’t work anymore this

way'.

My personal “signs” for change and my interpretation of Kuebler-Ross’ first stage: *denial*, are when I experience more moments in which I feel drained, disempowered, numb, or in pain than moments in which I feel invigorated, empowered, joyful and uplifted. Oftentimes, I feel no appetite but only the necessity to eat or I feel tired but cannot fall asleep. I feel *disconnected*. What is life trying to tell me that I try to ignore so stubbornly?

Why is it so hard to trust that as soon as we allow ourselves to fall and surrender into ‘giving up’, we can experience great relief? Maybe life just wants to unfold into another direction? Sometimes, if I can think like that, I feel excitement for life, excitement about the moment I am in. When I hear the rain dropping against the window while I am typing this, when I feel the water around me, as I swim in the morning, when I meet a cat in a street and we stop to say ‘hello’, when I hear the singing of birds in the early morning in front of my window or the bats’ high pitched noises late at night - these little moments make me feel alive. And without anticipating it, my muscles relax and I start connecting more strongly with others around me, and it feels as if a window opens where empathy and compassion can easily enter....

*After the little prince tamed the fox, the hour of his departure drew near -
"Ah," said the fox, "I shall cry."*

*"It is your own fault," said the
sort of harm; but you wanted
"Yes, that is so," said the fox.
"But now you are going to cry!"
"Yes, that is so," said the fox.
"Then it has done you no good
"It has done me good," said the
wheat fields."*



*little prince. "I never wished you any
me to tame you..."*

said the little prince.

*at all!"
fox, "because of the colour of the*

(Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de (1948). *The little prince*. English translation by Richard Howard (2000).

² Kuebler-Ross, E. (1969, 1997 edition). *On Death and Dying*. Touchstone, NY.

What Emptiness Allows

I have an endless memory of us
Before we fell from emptiness and into time
Before the great work and searching began
We had loved each other then and planned
The dream of all creation
Conspiring with the joys and dangers of chance for
Every fear and fight and breath,
Every thought and dream and dance
Every loss and gain and even death.

A few billion years here and there
To slowly craft light and life
An endless source for endless tales
Of everything lost and everything found
As we meet and part and meet again
And dance upon this miracle ground.

We left clever clues and images
Embedded in this opulent game
With puzzles and riddles
And pacts with the devil
To delight us and guide us
Until our work and we are done.

Regard the full moon's effulgence as the earth and you roll gently
Forward into night; you can feel the moonlight on your eyes
And hear with your ear as the earth moans with delight
As the tender evening sky tosses falling stars and kisses
That light your shinning eyes and quicken your heart with
Delicious dreams and wishes.

Did you think the eye and the ear were just a happy accident
Some outrageous randomness
So that for a moment the earth and moon and you could join in
Such awesome splendor?

Did you imagine the smell of snow
And the comfort of wings enfolding you



As heated mouth and sweat and hands
Explored the vast landscape of unspeakable bliss
To be nothing more than a fallen angel's kiss?

Or perhaps a less pleasant clue cuts through
When at times you sit alone with grief and fear
You cry the wrongness of it all and scream
No more, I am finished with this senseless dream.

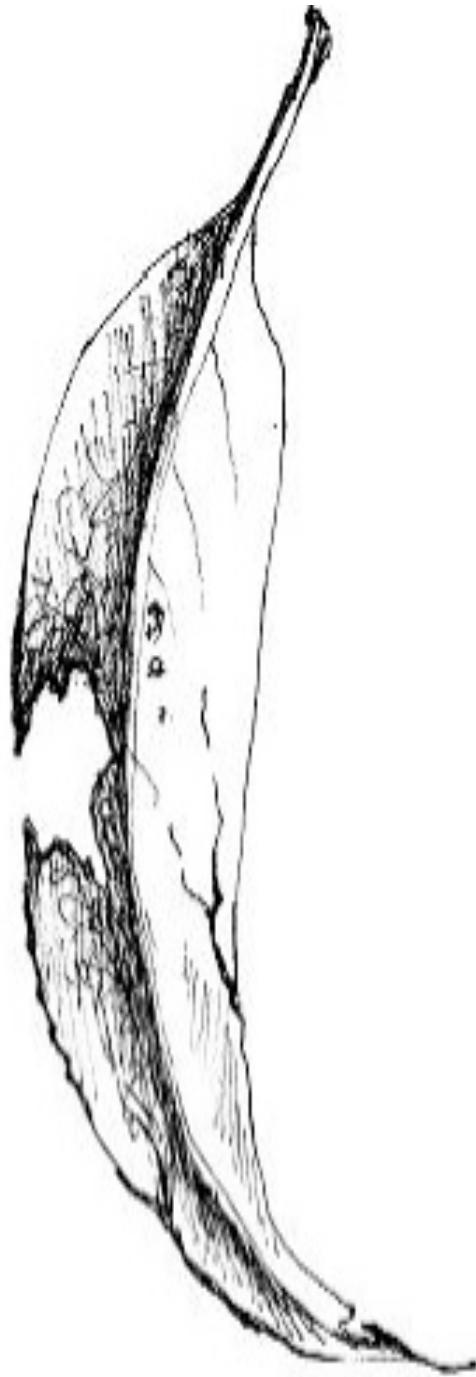
Yet even this we hold and take great care
Not to discard what has to be
Some time for this and time for that
Great joy and terror too
(From which I craft true life stories
Of just how much I've missed you).

When all this universe has grown old
And the last pulse of light has dimmed
We will at last have spent ourselves
And you and I will find our way
Back to where we were before
Before the fabulous fall.

I will dazzle you then as I try to now
with endless tales
Of how I searched from life to life
To find and love you always
And more than I could before

Then maybe just for fun
Fall back into time
And start to find you
Again and again and again.

This then is what emptiness allows:
When all is still and dreams dissolve
Other dreams will form and follow
But what remains and lasts forever



Is love that truly was
Truly lived
And truly done
And should you ever doubt this truth
Behold your heart and know the truth.

Larry Agriesti

Letting go of this world

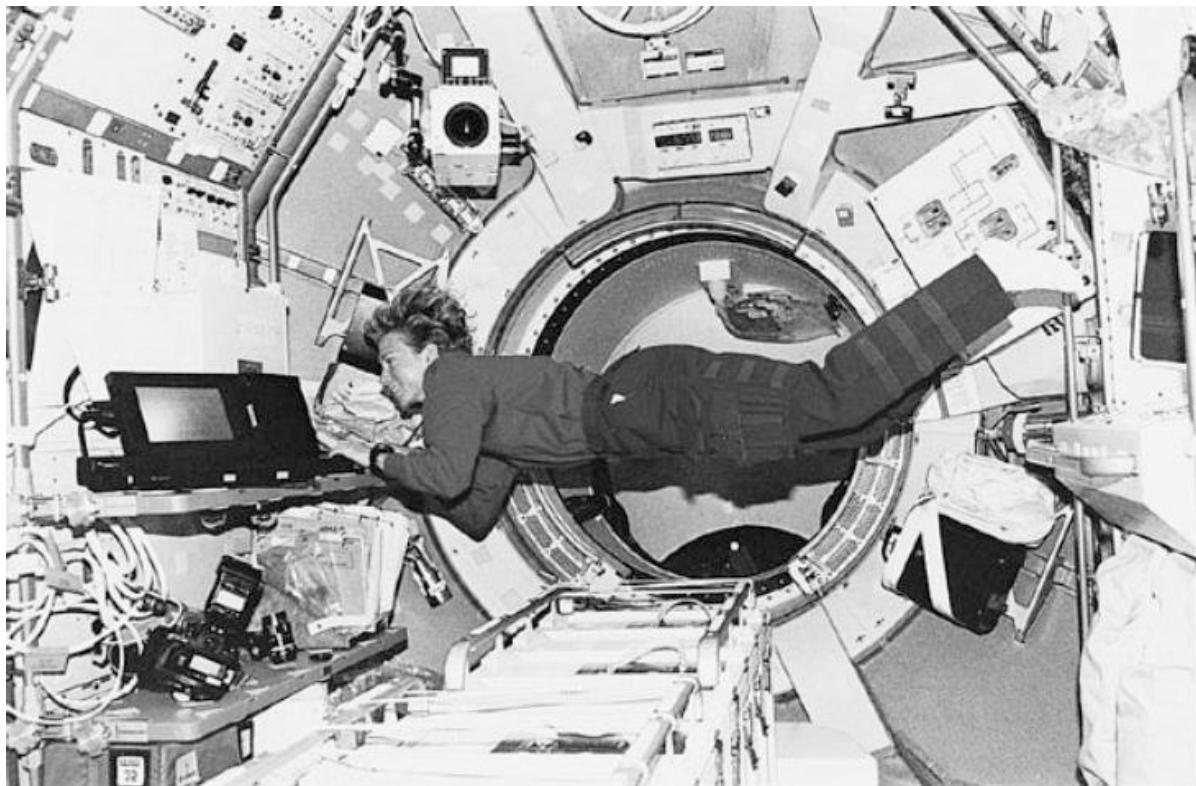


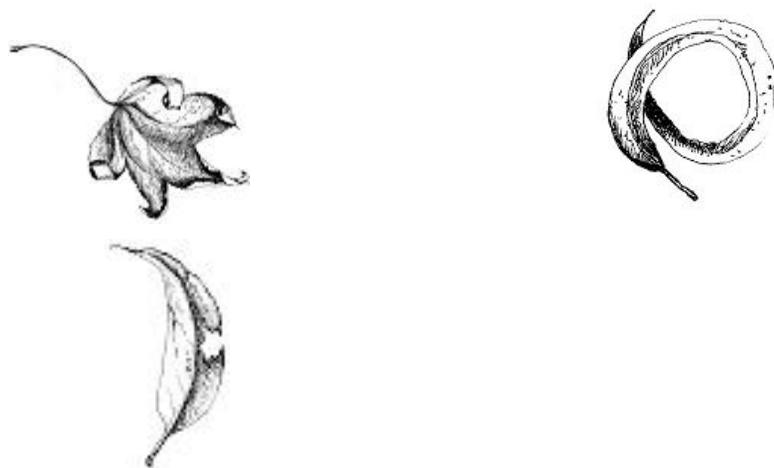
Photo: NASA <http://spaceflight.nasa.gov>

Wherever life places you

"It is pointless to curse fate, to harp on its being 'bad'. I am simply in a new place with new challenges, and new problems that must be faced. This insight could be summed up with two words: Stop Judging. Wherever life places you, that is where you are".

The novelist, Solzhenitsyn, described how, in a Soviet prison, his mind was filled with poetic images and novelistic scenes. "The head count of prisoners remained the same, but I was actually away on a distant flight".

(Taken from: Levine, M. (2000). *The positive psychology of Buddhism and yoga*. Erlbaum, New Jersey, U. S., chosen by Shauna Murray)



Letting Go

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Letting Go | Each breath - Inspiring, and |
| Letting go | Each hand - Holding, and |
| Letting go | Each footstep Treading, and |
| Letting go | My body Imbibing, and |
| Letting go | Heart Receiving, and |
| Letting go | Mind - Thought arising, and |
| Letting go | Sensing and non- Sense, and |
| Letting go | Who is this 'I' Expanding in -- Letting go |



Caroline Josephs

Inside, Outside - On Zen and the Environment

Part 1 – Connecting

What is this thing we call the 'environment'?

Our surroundings? Is it nature?

Where is the environment?

When there is no thought, what is my relationship with the environment?

Is there any space between this I and the environment?

Does it include my body? Am I in an emotional environment?

Does it include other people?

How big is my environment? All I can see? All I know about?

Does it include the whole Earth? The space around it?

Is my environment the whole universe? Is it infinite? What would it mean

if it was?



When I sit deep in zazen, and I hear rain fall, am I really apart from that?

Inside, outside - water trickles down

Part 2 - Engaging

What impact do I have on the environment?

How mindful am I of how my actions affect my surroundings?

How powerful am I to change the world?

An ant walks on the sink edge

Without thinking, I wash it down

How hard would it have been to pick it up and put it outside?

How many beings have I consciously killed?

How many beings have I unconsciously killed?

How does it feel in my heart?



How mindful am I of how my eating affects the environment?

What chemicals were used to produce this food?

How many beings died for this food to be here?

How mindful am I of where my food has come from?

What benefit have my actions been to my near environment?

What benefit have my actions been to my wider environment?
Are my actions felt on the other side of the Earth?
Do my actions affect the air? Are they felt out in space?
What impact does driving my car have on the environment?
How much of the ice caps have melted due to my actions?
How much do I ride my bicycle?
And what of the forests? Whales? Nuclear bombs?
What of world hunger and disease? What of declining biodiversity?



How much do I know these things?
How do my actions affect these things?
How does my lack of action affect these things?
How does my sitting in zazen affect these things?

Deep in zazen there is no thought, great peace, yet still a storm rattles
the windows
Inside, outside - water trickles down

Part 3 - Appreciating

Sitting in the dirt
With each breath, present to the air
I draw in deeply its nourishment, and feel its release
For each breath, I give a silent bow of thankfulness



I run my hands upon the ground
Beneath the broken sticks and leaves
My fingers deep into the soil
I feel the fear I have been taught to feel, of 'dirtiness', and I let it go
Nurtured and supported by this Earth
I give a silent bow of thankfulness

Rays of light caress my skin
I look up to the wondrous orb of the sun
I feel the fear I have been taught to feel, of sunlight, and I let it go
Held in the golden arms of this giver of life, the warmth pervades me
I give a silent bow of thankfulness

The presence of a tree
Such strength and stillness
Playing with the wind, in silent connection with the All
Each moment, growing imperceptibly
Each moment, dying imperceptibly
Such perfection



A raindrop tumbles down between its leaves
Appearing from nowhere, and vanishes into the Earth beside me
A gentle rain begins, each drop of water full of the sky, the rivers, the ocean, every tear ever shed, every being, all my actions, all my non-actions
In each drop I am contained
Gentle rain soaks my hair, runs down my cheeks
I smile
Inside, outside - water trickles down

Daniel Banfai

Not letting go



Photo: Jason Rust <http://www.rustyparts.com>

grace and loss

Before sesshin

I am travelling on the ferry, looking out at the harbour, the landscape as it slides by.

There is the familiar feeling that it is “I” that is looking. I am directing my gaze at the scene. The world is “out there” – separate, immutable. There is an energy actively sent from me out to the world. And inside this body, in this mind, there is an “I” that is observing the “out there”.

Sometimes I relax and become passive. Then the energy moves in the opposite direction. I receive from the landscape. I sense something of its true nature. I become, at least partially, receptive to its endless beauty. I am inspired and nurtured by it.

Yet I am always apart from it. I am in here. The world is out there - a painting on the wall.



After sesshin

standing on the quay
at the calming end of day
waiting for a ferry

harbour waves roil near the wharf
a crinkly sheet of dark water
bobbing with little tents

against the softening sky
the great arc of the iron bridge
linking two cities

the metal lace-work detaches
hovers in space
a drawing lifting from the page

floating towards me
a moment of fear
will it engulf

your harbour beauty
you pass clean through
as if I was air

I am a leaf in the wind
you advance whole
I feel your touch with all my skin

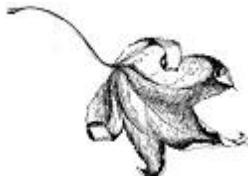


Some months later

I am walking along my street. All familiar, and dull. I try to let go and not think. The street remains the same. I stop trying. Then the sweet seeing happens. This street is a particular place, with its own character. The apartments arrayed on each side are neither beautiful nor ugly. Each building stands quietly in its own way. And the people – each one unique, travelling a singular path, each carrying and living in a personal universe.

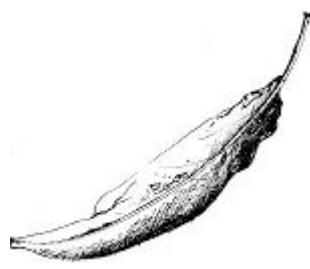
If I cannot let go enough, then so be it. But let me not grieve over what I have lost. Let me let go of that.

Doug Mason



Letting Go

Not
suicide after all;
not even madness,
as feared.



Released at last
into the clear clear sky
that old black bird



that keened night and day,
destroying anything new;
unchained the stale thoughts
of me and what I should be,
what I want and don't want;
the constantly gnawed bone.

The self-ropes untied.

The self-cage opened
to the universe.

And it's true;
“The things of the world
are just as they are”.

The gates are ALWAYS open.

Just breathing dew falls,
someone cries, a child smiles,
no-one holding ,nothing held;
each moment unrepeatable.

Why then do I sleep;
tie self- knots yet again?



Sally Hopkins

Blow Leaves

Words & Music: Denis Kevans - 1985

G

5 Verses

G D⁷ G C G

When myr - tie leaves fall in the val - ley, _____ A bright col - oured car - pet is laid, _____
 In media-e - val pag-eants re - mem ber, _____ They decked all the dan - ces with leaves, _____
 The myr - tles make sum - mer their aut umn, _____ They dish out the yel - low and red, _____
 I walked in this val - ley of wat ers, _____ Where the half-light is weav-ing its spell, _____

C G A

13 Down isles of the rain-for - est sal - ly, _____ those col - our - ful troops on pa - _____
 For they wor - shipped the trees and their beau - ty, _____ or so man - y peo - ple be - _____
 The green and the brown in their thou sands, _____ to make col - oured quilts for their _____
 And the leaves of the rain-for - est val leys, _____ they col - our my dream-ing as _____

D⁷ G D⁷ G C

rade, _____ Whipped by the winds of the even ing, _____ they rise, in a cloud to the _____
 lieved, _____ And here in the heat of the sum mer, _____ the pag - eants re - pea - ed once _____
 bed. _____ Along and a - way up the val - ley, _____ they wind, in a pat - tern, to _____
 well, _____ Like bing - o tick - ets in mill ions, _____ like lotter - y tick - ets gal _____

G C G

28 sky, _____ And shake out a hun - dred bright col - ours, _____
 more, _____ Where sum - mer leaves gath - er in thou s - ands, _____
 see, _____ And un - wind the parts of my memor - y, _____
 ore, _____ That na - ture has bought me for - e - ver, _____

A D⁷ G

33 and - fill up the tra - vell - er's eye. _____
 and dance, with their mates, on the floor. _____
 way back down the moun - tain for me. _____
 they lie on the rain - for - est floor. _____

I wake from a dream

Shauna Murray

Its mid December, warm and humid. I wake from a dream. Through my drowsiness, I dimly remember a profound sadness. I can't place the feeling. I am 8 and a half months' pregnant, full, voluptuous, round. I am expectant, poised, prepared. My belly is glistening, every tissue is taut, straining.

In a slice, I recall an image. In the dream, my body was empty. She was gone. I was left.

I am talking to my friend, Jo. She tells me her friend's words: *Motherhood is just one long letting go.*



Marisol, celebrating
Buddha's Birthday
(Photo taken by Tony
Coote)

trees

drifting clouds
touch the leaves
with their shadows



Doug Mason



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